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Spacecraft near Venus

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Imagine a place hot enough to melt zinc, with "air" pressure equal to the crushing forces found under 3,300 feet of water and with clouds made up in part of sulfuric acid mist.

That's Venus as we now know it. A more detailed picture of Earth's nearest planetary neighbor may emerge in the next several weeks

from eight American and Soviet spacecraft now approaching Venus.

Conceptions about the planet most similar to Earth in size, mass and distance from the sun have changed markedly in the past two decades.

Not long ago, some thought Venus was a kind of tropical paradise, or perhaps a place with oceans of bubbling petroleum or vast seas teeming with life.

Early misconceptions of Venus were easy because its surface is hidden behind a mask of murky atmosphere.

Records of Venus observations date back to the Assyrian civilization of 600 B. C. But man did not even know Venus had an atmosphere until Russian astronomer Mikhail Lomonosov made that discovery in 1761.

Venus continued to be the province of astronomers using Earth-bound instruments until an American spacecraft called Mariner 2 flew within 21,600 miles of the planet in 1962. Its instruments confirmed what astronomers were beginning to suspect — that Venus was very hot with a very dense and dry atmosphere.

Eleven spacecraft have since explored Venus, including four Soviet landing craft that radioed data back from the Venusian surface. The last two, Veneras 9 and 10, transmitted the first photos from the surface in 1975.

It is now known that Venus' surface temperature is at least 900 degrees Fahrenheit and its atmosphere is 100 times thicker than Earth's.

Carbon dioxide is the dominant gas in the Venusian atmosphere, apparently making up 97 percent of its composition. There are traces of water, carbon monoxide, hydrochloric acid and hydrogen fluoride.

The rotation of Venus is very slow and opposite to the direction of the planet's revolution about the sun. The length of a solar day on Venus is equal to 117 Earth days.

On the side of the planet facing Earth, radar astronomers have mapped an area as large as Asia and have found what appears to be a rugged surface with huge shallow craters and an enormous volcano-like structure.

The six American craft due to reach Venus Dec. 4 and Dec. 9 will concentrate on the Venusian atmosphere. One, Pioneer Venus 1, will orbit Venus for a year to return daily pictures of its cloud circulation and make radar maps of its surface. Five components of what originally was one Pioneer Venus 2 craft will dive into the planet's atmosphere, with four making top to bottom measurements.

The two Soviet spacecraft scheduled to get there later in December will attempt landings and surface studies, presumably to radio back more photos of the planet's rocky surface.

The key question that American and Russian scientists hope their probes will help answer is why does Venus differ so much from Earth when its size, mass and location suggest it might be Earth's twin?

Of more pragmatic importance, could Earth's climate evolve into one similar to Venus' someday?

UFOs seen in Grenada

Tiny nation asks U.N. aid

United Press International
UNITED NATIONS — Living in Grenada, a tiny nation most people couldn't spot on a map, gives one a sense of proportion. There's got to be something more to the world.

The prime minister of the 133-square-mile state sees Earth as the Grenada of the universe, and is sure we have cosmic neighbors we've never met.

And so, Sir Eric Gairy went before the United Nations Monday to suggest it become the worldwide clearing house for reports of unidentified flying objects.

Gairy says he is convinced aliens from far-off worlds are trying as fervently to find earthlings as we are to contact them.

"I think their message is a positive and friendly and a godly one," says Gairy, a self-proclaimed "mystic" who has been trying in vain since 1975 to get the United Nations to pay attention to UFOs.

Apparently unruffled by the cool reception he got in the past, Sir Eric launched into a discourse on his favorite topic, backed up by slides and films of UFO sightings.

Then he asked for permission to add three UFO experts to the staff of the Committee for the

Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. "The resolution as presented could not really embarrass any government at this time," Gairy

said, noting he merely wanted to establish a central agency to deal with UFO reports.

Dr. J. Allen Hynek, director of the Center for UFO Studies, a group of scientists, said an organized collection of material on unexplained aerial phenomena is vital.

Hynek, a professor emeritus of astronomy at Northwestern University, took a careful, academic approach to the problem. Dr. Gairy took a more personal approach to the subject.

The flamboyant prime minister said he believes UFOs are spaceships, populated by beings who want to "instill mankind on Earth with a better way of life."

"I have an interest in the spiritual side of life," Gairy told reporters. "That has motivated me to think that the planet Earth could not be all of God's domain."

"I'm connected with something that is esoteric," he said. "The prime minister told reporters he has had two personal UFO experiences, both in Grenada. The first sighting came about three years ago, at 2:10 a.m. as he was returning home from a nightclub, he said, and he has been a believer ever since."

"I was attracted by the tremendous speed and brilliance of the object," he said.

UFOs 'escape' fire of Mexican police officers

United Press International
GUADALAJARA, Mexico — Two objects described as luminous flying saucers were reported by residents and a police officer near Guadalajara, authorities said Monday.

The policeman said the UFO then descended rapidly behind some nearby hills and when he gave chase he found another flying object.

The police said they fired on the UFOs, both of which took off after rapidly emitting red light. Neither apparently was hit by the shots.

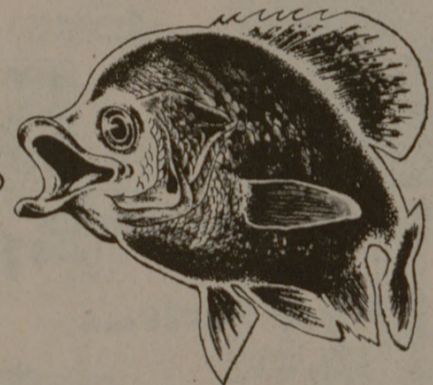
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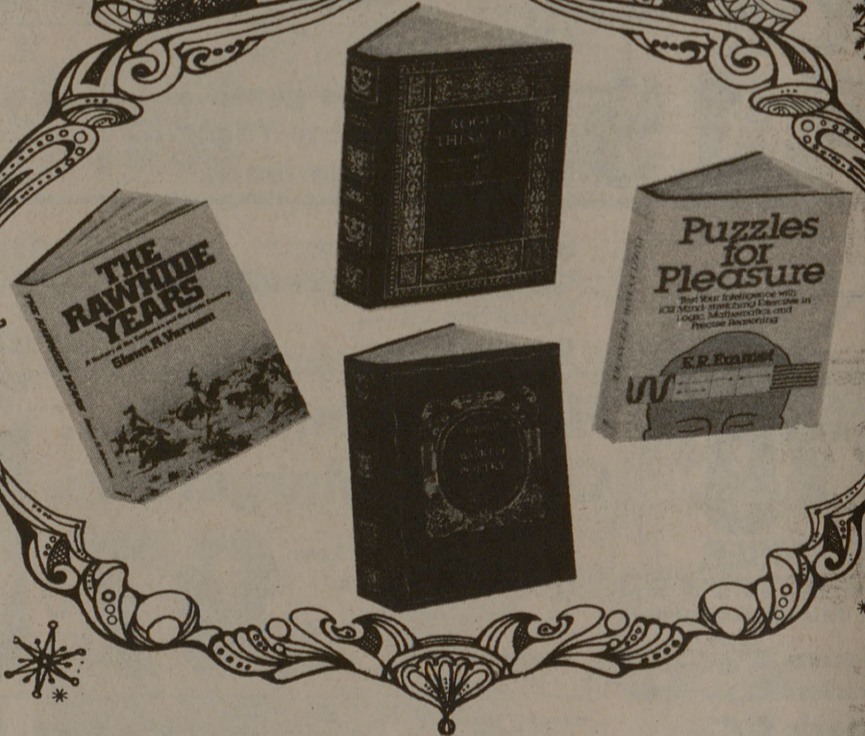
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